# SIGNS OF THE TIMES

By Righteous Hieromonk Seraphim Rose

In the following talk,[1] Fr. Seraphim speaks to us from almost twenty years ago, and yet his words are quite relevant to our times as we approach the end of the second millennium. Although some of the individual examples he gives are now dated, there are now even more extreme examples of the same phenomena of which he speaks. As always, he humbles his understanding before the holy Scriptures and their interpretation by the Orthodox Holy Fathers, and thus his teaching about the times remains timeless, free of the intellectual fashions and prejudices of this world. As time goes on, the Orthodox world view from which he received his wisdom will become ever more necessary for the spiritual survival of true Christians.

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## 1. WHY STUDY THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES?

THE SUBJECT of this talk is watching for the signs of the times. First of all, we have to know what it is meant by the phrase "signs of the times." This expression comes straight from the Gospel, from the words of our Saviour in Matthew 16:3. Christ tells the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to Him, "Ye can discern the face of the sky," that is, tell what the weather will be; "but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" In other words, He's telling them that this has nothing to do with science, or with knowing our place in the world, or anything of the sort. It's a religious question. We study the signs of the times in order to be able to recognize Christ.

During the time of Christ, the Pharisees and Sadducees did not study the signs of the times in order to see that Christ had come, that the Son of God was already on earth. There were already signs that they should have recognized. For example, in the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, there is a prophecy concerning the seventy weeks of years, which means that the Messiah was to come about 490 years from the time of Daniel. Those Jews who read their books very carefully knew exactly what this was all about, and at about the time that Christ came they knew that it was time for the messiah.

But this is an outward sign. More importantly, the Pharisees and Sadducees should have been watching for the inward signs. If their hearts had been right with God, and if they had not been merely trying to fulfill the outward commandment of the law, their hearts would have responded and recognized God in the flesh when He came. And many of the Jews did—the apostles, the disciples, and many others.

This same passage in the 16th chapter of St. Matthew speaks further about signs. Our Lord told the Jews, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonah." The events of the Old Testament contain prefigurations of events in the New Testament. When Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, this was a prefiguation

of our Lord's being three days in the tomb. And this sign—the sign of Jonah was given to the people of Christ's time.
Our Lord was telling the Pharisees and Sadducees that an evil and adulterous generation seeks for spectacular events, that is, fire coming down from heaven, or the Romans being chased away, angels manifesting themselves and banishing the foreign government of the Romans, and things of that sort. Christ told them this kind of sign would not be given. An evil and adulterous generation seeks after this, but those who are pure of heart seek rather something more spiritual. And the one sign that is given to them is the sign of Jonah. Of course, it is a great thing that a man should be three days in the grave and the rise up, being God.
Thus, from our Savior's words, we know that we are not to watch for spectacular signs, but we are rather to look inwardly for spiritual signs. Also, we are to watch for those things which according to Scripture must come to pass.

2. THE SIGNS GIVEN US BY CHRIST
We Orthodox Christians have already recognized and accepted the signs of Christ's First Coming. The very fact that we're Orthodox Christians means that we've done this. We know what these signs mean: for example, the sign of Jonah, the 490 years of Daniel, and many other things which our Lord fulfilled. Our Orthodox Divine services are filled with Old Testament prophecies which were fulfilled in the coming of Christ. These we all see and recognize—it all seems clear. But now we have to look for different kinds of signs, that is, the signs of the Second Coming of Christ. The whole teaching about the Second Coming of Christ and the signs which will precede it is set forth in several places in the Gospels, especially in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew. St. Mark and St. Luke also have chapters about this.
This chapter of St. Matthew tells of how our Lord departed from the Temple, and how his disciples came to him to show him the buildings of the Temple. Of course, in those days the Temple was the center of worship. Every Jew had to come to the Temple at least at Pascha, the Passover, for this alone was where God could be worshipped in the right way.
Our Lord looked at the Temple and told His disciples, "See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you: There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down." To tell a believing Jew at that time that the whole Temple is to be thrown down, that nothing is to be left of it, is like saying it's the end of the world, because the Temple is precisely the place where God is supposed to be worshipped. How are you going to worship God if there's no Temple? So these words of our Savior made the disciples start thinking about the end of the world. They immediately said, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of Thy coming, and of the end of the world?" In other words, they already knew that He was going to come again and that this would be bound up with the end of the world.
Then our Lord gives a whole set of signs which are to come to pass before He comes again. First of all He says, "Take heed that no man lead you astray. For many shall come in My name saying, 'I am Christ'; and shall lead man astray." That is, many false Christs will come. This we've already seen throughout the history of the Church: those who have risen up against the Church, those who have pretended to be God, pretended to be Christ.
Secondly, in the next verse He says, "Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. Se that ye be not troubled, for these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet." Of course, from the very beginning of the Christian era there have been wars and rumors of wars, and even more so in our time. "nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquake in diverse places." Again, wars, then famines, earthquakes. And He says, "All these things are the beginning of tribulation."
Then comes the next sign, which is persecutions. "Then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation, and shall kill you, and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake." So, first we have false Christs, then wars, rumors of wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions—and then a very important sign for our times concerning the growing cold of love: "Because iniquity shall be multiplied, the love

of many shall wax cold." This is the most deadly of all the signs, because the sign of Christians, as St. John the Theologian tells us, is that they have love for each other. When this love grows cold, this means that even the Christians are beginning to lose Christianity.
Then another sign, in the next verse of the 24th chapter: "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nation, and then shall the end come." This sign of the Gospel being preached unto all the nations we see about us now. The Gospel itself is produced in hundreds of languages now to almost all the tribes of the earth, and Orthodox Christianity is being preached in almost every country of the world. In Africa there are great missions: in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the Congo, and spreading out from there.
The a more difficult place: our Lord speaks concerning the abomination of desolation which is spoke of by Daniel the prophet. "When you see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place (let him that readeth understand)." That is, you're supposed to understand this from something else. This is another sign. It is concerned, of course, with the Temple in Jerusalem and some kind of desecration of it.
Then, in the 21st verse, there is the sign of great tribulation: "Then shall be great tribulation such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall be." That is, it will be the worst and most difficult time of suffering in the whole history of the world. You can read history books and find that there have been many times in the history of the world when there was great suffering. If you read about what happened to the Jews when Jerusalem was taken after the death of Christ, you will find that such suffering as went on then was unparalleled. In other places there has been almost as much suffering. And yet the great tribulation at the very end will be much worse. Of course, it will be worldwide and involve everyone, not just one people, and will be something of a very impressive character. It will be called "such tribulation that the world has never seen."
Just after this time, something even worse begins to come. Verse 29 reads: "Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken." Such an event, of course, has never been before, and this obviously refers to the time just at the end of the world, when the whole of creation prepares to be annihilated in order to be refashioned.
Finally, the next verse: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven," that is, the sign of the Cross will appear in the sky. "And then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory." That is, the very coming of Christ shall be in the heavens with the sign of the Cross—and that is the very end of everything.
After telling all this about the signs of the end, our Lord gives a final command, saying, "Watch, therefore, for you know not on what day your Lord cometh.... Therefore, be also ready, for in an hour that you think not, the Son of Man cometh."
All this is in the 24th chapter of the Gospel of St. Matthew. But all this, for anyone not thoroughly acquainted with Scriptures and the writings of Holy Fathers, almost raises more question than it solves. We must understand what is the meaning of all these prophecies. How can we know when they are really being fulfilled? And how can we avoid false interpretations?—because there are many false Christs, false prophets, false prophecies, false interpretations. How can we know what is the true interpretation and what are the true signs of the times? IF you look about you and go to any religious bookstore, you will see shelves containing many books of commentaries on the Book of Revelation (The Apocalypse), books with interpretations about the coming end of the world. In fact many Christians who are not Orthodox have a very definite feeling that these are the last times, but they all give interpretations based upon their own opinions.

3. THE BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNS
The first thing we must have if we are going to have the true interpretation of the signs of the times is something we can call basic Orthodox knowledge. That is, knowledge of the Holy Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments (and not just according to the way it seems, but according to the way

the Church has interpreted it); knowledge of the writings of Holy Fathers; knowledge of Church history; and awareness of the different kind of heresies and errors which have attacked the Church's true understanding of dogma and especially of the last times. If we do not have a grounding in sources such as these, we will find ourselves confused and unprepared. That is precisely what our Lord tells us: to be ready, to be prepared. Unless we have this basic knowledge, we will not be prepared and we will misinterpret the signs of the times.

A few years ago a book was printed in English which has become a fantastic bestseller for a religious book. It has sold over ten million copies in America. It's called The Late Great Planet Earth by Hal Lindsey, a Protestant Evangelical in Texas. In a rather superficial style he gives his interpretation of the signs of the times. He believes it's the last times we are living in now. He believes that everywhere around us there are being fulfilled these signs which our Lord talked about. If you read this book, you find that sometimes he gets something more or less correct according to our Orthodox understanding, sometimes he is totally off, and sometimes he is partly wrong, partly right. It's as though he's just guessing, because he reads the Scripture according to his own understanding. He has no basic Orthodox Christian knowledge, no background in the true knowledge of the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers. Therefore, if you read this book seriously, you will find that you become very confused. You don't know what to believe any more. He talks, for example, about a millennium which is supposed to come before the end of the world. He talks about the rapture, when Christians are supposedly gathered up into the heavens before the end of the world, and then watch how the people suffer down below. He talks about the building of the Temple in Jerusalem as though this is a good thing, as thought this is preparing for Christ's coming.

If you read such books as this (there are many other books like it; this one happens to be a bestseller because the author caught the imagination of people just at one particular time), and if you take them all as truth, you will find that instead of recognizing Christ—which is the whole reason for our understanding about the signs of the times—you will be accepting Antichrist.

Take, for example, the very question of the Temple in Jerusalem. It is true, according to Orthodox prophecies, that the Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem. If you look at people like Hal Lindsey, or even the Fundamentalist Carl McIntire, they are also talking about the building of the Temple, but they're talking about it as though we are building it in order for Christ to come back and reign over the world for a thousand years. What they are talking about is the coming of Antichrist. The millennium, according to the Protestant interpretation, as being a special thousand year reign at the end of the world, is actually the reign of Antichrist. In fact, there have already been people who have arisen and proclaimed their thousand year kingdom which is going to last until the end of the world. The last one was Adolf Hitler. This is based upon the same kind of chiliastic idea: that is, interpreting the millennium in a worldly sense. The actual thousand years of the Apocalypse is the life in the Church which is now, that is, the life of Grace; and anyone who lives it sees that, compared to the people outside, it is indeed heaven on earth. But this is not the end. This is our preparation for the true kingdom of God which has no end.

There are many books of basic Orthodox knowledge now available. Those who are seriously concerned about studying the signs of the times should first be very well versed in some of these books, and they should be reading them, seriously studying them, and having them as daily food. The best books to read are not someone's interpretation of Revelation (the Book of Apocalypse), because right now there's not really any Orthodox interpretation of this in English.[2]

The best books are the basic spiritual textbooks. First of all there are basic texts of Orthodox dogmas, the various catechisms. One of the best is the eighth century work of St. John Damascene, On the Orthodox Faith, which goes through the whole of the catechism. An even earlier one is St. Cyril of Jerusalem's Catechetical Lectures, that is, lectures prepared for people about to be baptized, which goes through the whole Creed and tells what the Church believes. There are many similar books of catechism, both in ancient times and in more modern times. More recently we have the catechisms in Russian of Metropolitan Platon and Metropolitan Philaret, which are a little shorter and simpler.

Then there is a different kind of book: commentaries on Holy Scriptures. There are not too many of these in English,[3] but we do have some of the commentaries of St. John Chrysostom. This area is a little bit weak in English, because there are many good books in Russian which are not in English yet, including more recent books of commentaries on the Scriptures, even on the Apocalypse. Archbishop Averky's books are very good, but they're just being put into English now. God willing, before too long, they will be out.[4]

Then, besides these two kinds of books—basic catechism and commentaries on Scripture—there are all the books on Orthodox spiritual life. These include the Lausiac History (which tells about how the monks lived in Egypt, and how they fought spiritually), the Dialogues of St. Gregory of Rome, the Lives of Saints, The Ladder of St. John, the Homilies of St. Macarius the Great, the books of St. John Cassian, the Philokalia, Unseen Warfare and St. John of Kronstadt's My Life in Christ. These books deal with basic Orthodox spiritual life, spiritual struggle, how to discern the wiles of the demons, how not to fall into deception. All of them give a basic foundation by which to understand the signs of the times.

Then there are the works of more recent writers who are in the same patristic spirit as the ancient Holy Fathers. The main examples are the two great writers of 19th century Russia, Bishop Theophan the Recluse and Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov,[5] whose works are now coming out gradually in English. Bishop Ignatius' book The Arena and various articles by Bishop Theophan are in English.[6] These two writers are very important because they transmit the patristic teaching down to our times. They have already explained many questions which arise concerning how to understand the Holy Fathers. For example, the new Orthodox Word has a whole text of Bishop Ignatius on the toll houses which the soul meets after death. Sometimes, in reading the Holy Fathers, one has questions on such subjects and doesn't quite know how to understand what the ancient Fathers say, and these more recent Father explain these texts.

There are the histories of the Church, which tell of God's revelation to men and how God acts with regard to men. It is very instructive to read the stories of the Old Testament, because exactly the same things repeat themselves in the New Testament. Then one should read, along with he New Testament, the histories of the New Testament Church. For example, there's a pocketbook of Eusebius' History of the Church, which traces the history of the Church down through the first three centuries, written from an Orthodox Christian point of view.[7] It's very important to see what early Church writers saw was important in the history of the Church: the martyrs, the apostles, and so forth.

So all these different kinds of writings help to prepare us with basic Christian knowledge, that is, catechisms, commentaries on Scripture, books on spiritual life, more recent patristic books in this same spirit, and histories of the Church. Before we do too much reading about what specifically the signs of the times mean, we should have a basic background in all of these categories of books. All of them prepare one to understand something about the signs of the times. Once one has begun to prepare oneself like this, it is not merely a matter of adding knowledge up in one's head and being able to repeat by heart certain phrases, to have exactly the right interpretation of a Bible verse, or anything of the sort.

## 4. SPIRITUAL DISCERNMENT

The most important thing that one acquires through reading such basic Orthodox literature as this is a virtue which is called discernment. When we come to two phenomena which seem to be exactly alike or very similar to each other, the virtue of discernment allows us to see which of them is true and which is false: that is, which has the spirit of Christ and which might have the spirit of Antichrist. The very nature of Antichrist, who is to be the last great world ruler and the last great opponent of Christ, is to be anti Christ—and "anti" means not merely "against," but also "in imitation of, in place of." The Antichrist, as all the Holy Fathers say in their writings about him, is to be someone who imitates Christ, that is, tires to fool people by looking as though he is Christ come back to earth. Therefore, if one has a very vague notion of Christianity or reads the Scriptures purely from one's

own opinions (and one's opinions come from the air, and the air is not Christian now, but anti Christian), then one will come to very anti Christian conclusions. Seeing the figure of Antichrist, one will be fooled into thinking that it is Christ.

We can give a few examples of how the virtue of discernment can help us to understand some fairly complicated phenomena. One such phenomenon is the charismatic movement. There is a Greek priest, Fr. Eusebius Stephanou in Indiana, who is spreading this movement in the Orthodox Church. He has a rather large number of followers and sympathizers. He's even been to Greece and is going again soon, and there too people are sometimes quite overwhelmed by him.

One can see that part of the reason for his success is that he comes from an Orthodox church atmosphere in which people, being born Orthodox, go to Orthodox church, receive sacraments, and take the whole thing for granted. Since it becomes with them a matter of habit, they do not understand that the whole meaning of the Church is to have Christ in the heart, but that one can go through the whole of Orthodox Church life without having one's heart awakened. In that case, one is just like the pagans. In fact, one is more responsible than the pagans. The pagans have never heard of Christ, while the person who is Orthodox and does not know what spiritual life is simply has not yet awakened to Christ.

This is the kind of atmosphere from which Fr. Eusebius comes. Seeing that this is a spiritual deadness—and it's quite true that much of what is in the Orthodox Church is spiritually dead—he wants to make it come to life. But the trouble is that he himself belongs to the same spirit. In fact, you very seldom see that he reads the basic Orthodox books. He picks one or two that seem to agree with his point of view, but he does not have a thorough grounding in the Orthodox sources. He does not think that they are the most important things to be reading.

If you look deeply at what he and other people in the charismatic movement are saying—and our book The Religion of the Future goes into detail on this subject— you see that what they call a spiritual revival and a spiritual life is actually what more recent Fathers like Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov carefully described as deception, that is, a kind of fever of the blood which makes it look as though one is being spiritual when actually one is not even grasping spiritual reality at all. In fact, it's as different from true Christian life, which is reflected in these very basic Orthodox books, as heaven is from earth.

Quite apart from the details of how they pray and what kind of phenomena manifest themselves at their services, you can see that the very basic idea which Fr. Eusebius and these charismatics have is a false idea. Yesterday we received an issue of Fr. Eusebius' magazine, Logos. There he talks about the great outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the last times preparing for the coming of Christ. All Christians are supposed to be renewed, to receive the Holy Spirit, to be speaking in tongues. This prepares for the coming of Christ, and there will be a great spiritual outpouring before Christ comes.

If you read the Scriptures carefully, without putting your prejudices into them, even without the patristic commentaries you will see that nowhere is anything said about a great spiritual outpouring at the end of the world. Christ Himself says the contrary. First he gives His teaching concerning how we should pray and have faith and not be faint. He presents the example of the woman who goes to the judge and keeps begging him to intercede in her case, and He tells us that this is how we should continue to pray and pray and pray until God hears us and gives to us. This is a very solid example about praying. Then He says, "Nevertheless" (that is, despite the fact that I've given you this teaching and this is the way to pray), "nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?" In other words, despite the fact you've been given all this, there will be practically no one left who is a Christian at the end of the world. "Will He find faith on the earth?" means He will find almost no one left. There will not be flocks of people who are praying and inspired with the Holy Spirit at the end of time. All Holy Fathers who speak about this subject speak about the great terrible times at the end, and say that those who are true Christians will be hidden away and will not even be visible to the world. Those who are visible to the world will not be the true Christians.

Today there are tremendous charismatic revivals at Notre Dame University, and in Jerusalem there is every year now a charismatic conference on the Holy Spirit. Sixty, seventy thousand people come

together and pray and raise up their hands, and they all speak in tongues. It looks as though the time of the Apostles has come back, but if you look at what goes on there, you see it's not the right spirit; it's a different spirit.
Therefore, when Fr. Eusebius speaks about St. Symeon the New Theologian, and about how you must know Who the Holy Spirit is and receive Him consciously, this is fine, this is good teaching—but if you have the wrong spirit, that teaching does not apply. And this is not the right spirit. There are many signs evident that it is a different spirit and not the Spirit of God.
Here is one case where, if you have discernment from basic Christian knowledge, you can look at a phenomenon which claims to be apostolic and just like the times of the early Church preparing for Christ's Second Coming, and if you look closely you can see it is not the same thing. In fact, if anything, it's just like those who want to build the Temple for Christ. They're building for Antichrist; it's totally the opposite.
Again, you can see how discernment enables us to evaluate other phenomena which may not be identical with Orthodox phenomenon, but are new things. When you first look at them, you wonder what they are all about. This is characteristic of intellectual fashions: something gets into the air, everybody grabs it because the times are ripe for it, and then everybody begins to talk about it and it becomes the fashion of the times. Nobody quite knows how; it's just that everybody was ready for it, and all of a sudden somebody mentioned it and it began to circulate everywhere.

5. THE DISTORTION OF CHRISTIAN EQUALITY

We have one particular idea right now that's taking possession of people: the so called idea of women's liberation. This takes the form of women priestesses in the Anglican Church, and also in the Catholic Church, which is preparing for it now. Of course, if you look at this seriously, sit down and think about it, and you read what St. Paul says about women and so forth, you have no problems. It's all very clear that this is some kind of crazy new idea. But it is also very interesting to look at this more deeply and see where it comes from—why is there such an idea, what is it, what's behind it?—because if you understand the strategy of the devil, you're a little better equipped to fight against it.
This particular idea of women's liberation can be traced back at least two hundred years. Of course, you can go back even before that, but its present from goes back at least two hundred years, to the forerunners of Karl Marx, the early Socialists. These Socialists were talking about a great new utopian age which is going to come when all the distinctions of class and race and religion and so forth are abolished. There will be a great new society, they said, when everybody is equal. This idea, of course, was based originally upon Christianity, but it distorted Christianity, and amounted to its opposite.
There was a particular philosopher in China in the late nineteenth century who brought this philosophy to its logical conclusion, as far as it could go. His name is K'ang Yu Wei (1858 1927). He's not particularly interesting except as he incarnates this philosophy of the age, this spirit of the times. He was actually one of the forerunners of Mao Tse Tung and the takeover of China by the communists. He based his ideas not only on distorted Christianity, which he took from the liberals and Protestants in the West, but also on Buddhist ideas. He came up with the idea of a utopia which was to come into being, I think, in the 21st century according to his prophecies. In this utopia, all ranks of society, all religious differences, and all other kinds of differences which affect social intercourse will be abolished. Everyone will sleep in dormitories and eat in common halls. And then with his Buddhist ideas he began to go beyond this. He said that all distinctions between the sexes would be abolished. Once mankind is united, there's not reason to halt there—this movement must go on further. There must be an abolition between man and animals. Animals also will come into this kingdom, and once you have animals... The Buddhists are also very respectful to vegetables and plants; therefore, the whole vegetable kingdom has to come into this paradise, and in the end the inanimate world, also. So, at the very end of t he world, where will be an absolute utopia of all kinds of beings who have somehow become intermingled with each other, and everybody's absolutely equal.

Of course, you read about this and you say the man must be crazy. But if you look deeply, you see that this is coming from a deep desire to have some kind of happiness on earth. No pagan philosophy, however, gives happiness; no man made philosophy gives happiness. Only Christianity gives hope for a kingdom which is not of this world. The idea to have a perfect kingdom comes from Christianity, but since the early Socialists did not believe in the other world or in God, they dreamed of making this kingdom in this world. That is what communism is all about.
We see what happens, of course, when this idea is put into practice. You have the experiment of the French Revolution, which had apparently good ideas—liberty, equality, fraternity—or the Bolshevik Revolution, or in more recent times the various other communist revolutions. Last of all you have Cambodia, a poor little country which for three years suffered absolute communism and found that at least one fourth of its population was exterminated because it didn't fit. Everyone who had more than a high school education had to be eliminated, everyone who thought for himself, and so forth. Now the regime has been overthrown by people who are a little less ruthless, but there's nothing much to cheer about.
This shows that once you try to put these ideas into operation, you get, not paradise on earth, but more like hell on earth. In fact, the whole experiment in Russia for the last sixty years has been a proof of this, that there is no paradise on earth, except in the Church of Christ, with sufferings.[8] Our Lord prophesied that already in this life we would receive back a hundredfold what we give, but it must be with persecutions and sufferings. Those who wish to have this happiness on earth without suffering and persecutions, and without even believing in God, make hell on earth.

6. "CHRISTIAN" INTEREST IN UFOs

A second example of a new phenomenon, which at first sight one doesn't know what to make of, is the now very common phenomenon of UFOs, flying saucers.
There is a particular Protestant evangelist, the above mentioned Carl McIntire, who is extremely strict and righteous and very Bible believing. He has a radio program, the Twentieth Century Reformation, and a newspaper. He is absolutely upright—you have to separate from all people who are in apostasy—and his ideas are very nice. He's anti-communist. He calls Billy Graham an apostate, together with everyone who deviates from the strict line of what he thinks is right. From this point of view he's very strict, and yet you see the strangest things in his philosophy. For example, he's building himself the Temple of Jerusalem, in Florida. He has a model of the Temple, and he wants to build it so as to make it compete with Disneyworld. People will come and pay to see the great Temple which is soon going to be built for Christ to come to earth. This is supposed to provide a good opportunity to witness Christianity.
He goes in for the flying saucers, also. In every issue of his newspaper there's a little column called "UFO Column," and there they talk, to one's great astonishment, about all the wonderful, positive things which these flying saucers are doing. The give conferences and make movies about them. Just recently there have been several Protestant books about UFOs, showing quite clearly that they're demons. The person who writes the column in this newspaper got upset about this, and said that some people say that these beings are demons, but we can prove they aren't. He says that maybe a couple of them are demons, but most of them aren't. He cites a recent case in which some family in the Midwest saw a flying saucer. The flying saucer came down, landed, and the family saw inside little men— they're usually four and half feet tall or so—and they sang "Hallelujah." They stopped and looked and then they flew away; I guess they didn't talk to them any more. And that set the family to thinking; they began to think "Hallelujah"; they began to think about Christianity; they looked in their Bibles, and they finally ended up going to a Fundamentalist church and being converted to Christianity. Therefore, he says, these beings must be some kind of people who are helping God's plan to make the world Christian because they said "Hallelujah."
Of course, if you read Bishop Ignatius Brianchaninov, you will know about all the deceptions which the demons perpetrate: the demons "pray" for you, the demons make miracles, they produce the most wonderful phenomena, they bring people to church, they do anything you want, as long as they

keep you in this deception. And when the time comes, they will suddenly pull their tricks on you. So these people, who have been converted to some kind of Christianity by these so called outer space beings, are waiting for the next time they will come; and the next time their message may have to do with Christ coming to earth again soon, or something of the sort. It's obvious that this is all the work of demons. That is, where it's real. Sometimes it's just imagination, but when it's real this kind of thing obviously comes form demons.

This is very elementary. If you read any text of the early Fathers, any of the early Lives of Saints or the Lausiac History, you find many cases where beings suddenly appear. Nowadays they appear in spaceships because that's how the demons have adapted themselves to the people of the times; but if you understand how spiritual deception works and what kind of wiles the devil has, then you have no problems in understanding what's going on with these flying saucers. And yet this person who writes the UFO column is an absolutely strict Fundamentalist Christian. He is looking, actually for new revelations to come from beings from outer space.

7. WHY WE MUST HAVE AN ORTHODOX WORLD VIEW

So, to repeat the first point: we watch the signs of the times in order to recognize Christ when He comes, because there have been many false Christs, many more false Christs will come, and at the very end of the world there will finally come one who is called Antichrist. The Antichrist will unite all those who are deceived into thinking he is Christ, and this will include all those whose interpretation of Christianity has gone off. Often you can look at some people who confess Christianity, and it seems that many of their ideas are correct—they go according to the Bible. Then you look here and there, and you see that here's a mistake, there's a mistake.

Just recently Fr. Dimitry Dudko, in the little newspaper he puts out, said there came to him someone who claimed to be Christian. As he began to talk to him, he began to feel that this person wasn't Orthodox, and he said, "What confession are you?" "Oh, that's not important. We're all Christians. The only important thing is that we be Christians." He said, "Well, no, no, we have to be more precise than than that. For example, if you're a Baptist and I'm an Orthodox, I believe that we have the Lord's Body and Blood, and you don't." We must be precise because there are many differences. It's good to have the attitude: I have respect for you, and I won't interfere with your faith, but nonetheless there's a true way of believing and there are ways which go away from the truth. I must be according to the truth.

In the same way we can see that many people who are not Orthodox have many good things about them, and then they go off in some respect. In the end it's up to God to judge, not to us. But we can see what will happen if all these little ways people go off now are projected into the last times, if people still believe that way when the last times come. These mistakes cause people, when they see Antichrist, to think that he is Christ. There are very many sects now which believe that Christ is coming to rule for a thousand years form the Temple in Jerusalem. Therefore, when the Jews start building the Temple, these sects will only rejoice because, to them, this is the sign of Christ's coming. On the contrary, we know that this isn't he sign of the Antichrist coming, because Christ will no more come ot the Temple. The Temple has been destroyed. Christ comes only at the end of the world to begin the eternal kingdom of heaven. The only one who will come to the Temple is Antichrist.

So, this is why the correct Orthodox Christian understanding and preparation based upon this understanding are absolutely necessary. The closer we get to the very last times, the more indispensable this understanding and preparation are.

8. A LOOK AT SPECIFIC SIGNS

Now let us look for just a moment at some of the signs in our times that the Second Coming of Christ, preceded by the coming of Antichrist, is close. Concerning the prophecies set forth in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew—first of all, the false christs who will come, then the wars, famines, earthquakes, persecutions—it is difficult to judge, because all these things have been happening for almost two thousand years now. It's true that they are now an a bigger scale than ever before, but it

is also true that they can be much worse yet. These signs are the beginning of signs, and are not yet so severe that we can say we are right in the very last days.
One sign, however , is very interesting and very indicative of our times, that that is that Christ is now depicted on the stage. In previous times it was never allowed that Christ should be depicted on the stage, because an actor gives his own human interpretation, and Christ is God. In Orthodoxy there is perhaps no particular canon about this, but the whole Orthodox Christian outlook is against it; and nay Protestant or Catholic until the last few years would have been horrified at the idea of some actor playing the part of Christ. Now this has become common, and not only in religious contexts, but in contexts which are far from religious. Godspell, Jesus Christ Superstar, and so forth: all these are actually blasphemous parodies which present Christ in secular form for people to see.[9] This is very symptomatic of our times because it presents even to unbelieving people an image of Christ so that when Antichrist comes they will say, "Aha, I saw on the stage something like that. Yes, that must be it."

9. THE GROWING COLD OF LOVE

Another very symptomatic sign of our times is the next one mentioned in this chapter of Matthew: that the love of many grows cold. This seems to be a definite characteristic of our times, to a quite greater degree than at any time in past history. One can see this in what can be called nihilism. People commit crimes for no particular reason, not for gain but just for a thrill because they do not have God inside them. In all kinds of places now, one can see the lack of normal human relationships in families, which produces cold people. It is this kind of people who, in a totalitarian society, are used as slave drives, working in the concentration camps and so forth.
Recently we had the tragedy in Jonestown, which was composed of American citizens. The people there were idealists who devoted themselves utterly to a cause. Although it's come out now that it was actually a communist commune, still the people were supposed to be Christians. The leader was a minister of the so called Church of Christ, one of the mainline denominations. And yet these people, supposedly having some awareness of God and Christianity, coldly killed each other. Those who drank and administered the poison to their children did so with calm faces. There's no problem: that's just your duty, that's what you're told to do. This kind of coldness is what Christ is talking about. Any kind of normal human warmth has been abolished because Christ has gone out of the heart; God is gone. This is a frightful sign of our times. In fact, they very thing that happened in Jonestown is a warning because it looks as though much worse things are going to come. This is satan's work, quite obviously.
Just a year or two before that occurred, we heard of what happened in Cambodia. A small party of men—some ten or twenty altogether—took a whole country in their hands and killed off at least two million people quite ruthlessly, based on some abstract ideas. We're going to get back to the country, they said; therefore, everybody is to leave the cities. If you can't leave the city, you die. People in the hospitals had to go from their operating tables, and if they couldn't go, they died—they were shot and left in a ditch. Corpses were piled up in the cities—it was frightful.
This was the same kind of thing as what occurred in Jonestown: coldness based upon the idea—which looks idealistic—of brining communism to earth. It turns out that Dostoyevsky was right. In his book The Possessed, written in the 1870s, there was a Russian character named Shigalov, a theoretician, who had an absolute theory of how communism could come to earth. He believed that the ideal state upon earth will be true communism. Unfortunately, he said, in order to make sixty million people happy, you have to kill a hundred million people. But those sixty million people will be happier than anyone else has ever been happy, and the hundred million people will be like fertilizer for the future world paradise. It so happens that in Russia there have been exactly a hundred million people missing since 1917, of which at least sixty million were killed by the Soviets themselves.
So this sign is very, very present in our times: that love grows cold. This occurs among Christians also, not just in the world at large.

Then another sign, which in our times has reached greater dimensions than every before, is that the Gospel is being preached in the whole world. This, of course, is true in that the very text of the Gospel is being spread in almost all the languages which are spoken on the earth now—at least a thousand languages, I think. Moreover, the Orthodox Gospel is being preached all over Africa now. We send our magazines to Uganda and Kenya, and receive letters back—very touching letters from young African boys who are converts to Orthodoxy. They have the utmost respect for their bishop; they go to seminary. It's obvious that a very Orthodox feeling is being given to these people in Africa. They are very simple people. Orthodoxy does not have to be complicated if there are very simple people to preach the Gospel to. It's only when others come in to challenge it and to say that the Scripture means something else, trying to give over literal interpretation which mean doing away with priests and bishops, etc., that the people begin to get mixed up. If they're preached the Orthodox Gospel, simple people respond now in the same way that they've always responded in the past. The problem is, rather, with complicated people.

10. THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM

Then there is the sign of the abomination of desolation and all that relates to the Temple in Jerusalem. For the first time in history, this has now become a possibility. The rebuilding of the Temple was tried only once before, in the fourth century. Knowing about this is a very good example of how reading Church history enlightens one. We can find several sources about it from the fourth century: St. Cyril mentions it, as do several of the Church historians at that time. Julian the Apostate, because he had such a passion to overthrow Christianity, decided that, since Christ had prophesied that not one stone of the Temple would be left on the other, if he rebuilt the Temple, he would prove that Christ was an impostor, and therefore paganism could be restored. So he deliberately invited the Jews back to Jerusalem, and they began building the Temple with the blessing of Julian the Apostate. They would build a little in the daytime, and the next morning they would come and all the stones would be on the ground. They tried again and balls of fire began to come out of the earth. All the historians agree on this. In fact, modern rationalist historians, because they see that they cannot deny the texts and that something did actually happen, begin to say things like, "They must have struck oil," or "There were underground gas flues." It was obviously a miracle of God to keep the Temple from being built, because it was not the time—the Temple is to be built only at the very end of the world. Anyway, they finally failed in their attempt and gave up the operation. Of the few stones that remained, not one was left on the other. So the prophecy was fulfilled in the time of Julian the Apostate.

But now, since 1967, the site where the Temple was before is now in the hands of the Jews. Therefore for the first time, it becomes quite possible that the Temple could be built. The only thing interfering is the great mosque which the Moslems have there. If that's destroyed, there will probably be a war.

Only since 1948 has there been a separate state of Jews in the Holy Land. It is to the unbelieving Jews that the Antichrist will come. He will come first to the Jews and then to the whole world through the Jews; and only as this is happening will the faithful remnant of Jews finally be converted to Christianity in the very last times. So this sign of the Temple is a very big one. When we see the Temple being built, then we know that the time is at hand, because that is definitely one of the signs of the very end. So far, of course, it's not being built, but there are all kinds of rumors that plans have been laid, that stones are being gathered, etc. It's obvious that the Jews are thinking about it.

11. OTHER SIGNS

Another sign is the fact that when Antichrist comes he is to be the ruler of the world, and only in our times has it been a practical reality that one man can rule the entire world. all world empires up until now have been only over part of the earth, and before modern communications it was impossible for one man to rule the entire world.

Furthermore, with increased communications, with atomic bombs and more advanced weapons, the possibility of a worldwide tribulation now becomes much greater than ever before. It's obvious that the next war will be the most destructive in the history of mankind, and probably will cause, in its first few days, more damage than all the wars in history. Besides atomic weapons, there are various bacteriological weapons for spreading plagues among people, poisonous gases and all kinds of fantastic things which in an all out war could come into play.
Also, the fact that all the peoples of the world are bound up more with each other means that when some great catastrophe comes to one country—a depression, or something of the sort—then all the rest of the world will be affected. This we already saw in the 1930s when there was a Great Depression in America and it spread to the rest of Europe. In the future it's obvious that something much worse can occur. If one country begins to starve, or if the crops fail one year in Canada, Australia, America and Russia—all those four great countries which supply what—just imagine how the whole world is going to suffer.

12. A WARNING TO THOSE ATTRACTED TO GLOOM AND DOOM
All these signs of the times are very negative. They are signs that they world is collapsing, that the end of the world is at hand and that the Antichrist is about to come. It's very easy to look at all these negative signs of the times and get into such a mood that we look only for negative things. In fact, one can develop a whole personality—a negative kind of personality—based on this. Whenever some new news item comes in, one says, "Aha, yes of course, that's the way it is, and it's going to get worse." The next one comes in and one says, "Yes, yes, it's obvious that's what's going to happen, and now it's going to be worse than that." Everything one looks at is seen merely as a negative fulfillment of the horrible times.
It's true that we have to be aware of these things and not be unduly optimistic about contemporary events, because the news in our times is seldom good. At the same time, however, we have to keep in mind the whole purpose of our watching the signs of the times. We watch the signs of the times not just so we can see about when Antichrist is going to come. That's rather a secondary thing. We watch the signs of the times so we can know when Christ is going to come. That is a very fundamental thing we have to keep in mind so we do not get overwhelmed by gloom, depression, or stay to ourselves, storing up food for the great calamity. That's not a very wise thing. We have to be, rather, all the more Christian, that is, thinking about other people, trying to help others. If we ourselves are cold and gloomy and pessimistic, we are participating in this coldness which is a sign of the end. We have to ourselves be warm and helping each other out. That's the sign of Christianity.
If you look at history (in fact, this is another good reason for reading Church history), you see that throughout the whole history of mankind, throughout the Old Testament, the New Testament and all the Christian kingdoms afterwards—and if you look at the pagan world, the same story—there's a continual time of sufferings. Where Christians are involved there are trials and persecutions, and through all of these Christians have attained the kingdom of heaven.
Therefore, when the time of the persecutions come, we are supposed to rejoice. There was a good little incident related in Fr. Dimitry Dudko's little newspaper. A woman in Russia was put in a psychiatric clinic for making the sign of the Cross in the wrong place or for wearing a cross, or something like that. Fr. Dimitry and his spiritual children traveled to Moscow, went to the clinic, made an appointment and talked to the doctor, and they finally persuaded him that she shouldn't be there. Fr. Dimitry says, "They're actually afraid of us, because when you press them about it, they say they haven't really got any law by which they can keep her there." So finally they agreed to let her go, after she had been there for a week. When she was there they gave her various drugs and "inoculations," trying to break her down and get rid of her religion. When she came out she was a little shaken up. She sat down on a bench someplace outside the clinic and began to talk. "You know," she said, "when I was there and they were treating me so awful, I felt calm because I felt there was Someone there protecting me; but as soon as I got out here, all of a sudden I'm afraid. Now I'm all upset and scared that they are going to come after me again, that the secret police are

looking right around the corner." It's obvious why this is so. When you're in conditions of persecution, Christ is with you because you're suffering for Him. And when you're outside, then there's the uncertainty of whether you might not get back into that condition. You begin to go back to your own human understanding. When you're there you have nothing else to rely on, so you have to have Christ. If you haven't got Christ, you have nothing. When you're outside, you begin to calculate and to trust yourself, and then you lose Christ.

[1] A talk given at St. Herman's Women's' conference in Redding, California, in the summer of 1980. This talk, which has never before appeared in print, was transcribed from the tape archives of the St. Herman Brotherhood. Fr. Seraphim gave another talk on the same subject in May of 1981, at the University of California, Santa Cruz. That talk, entitled "Signs of the Coming of the End of the World," is available on cassette tape.
[2] Fr. Seraphim gave this talk before the publication of his translation of Archbishop Averky's Commentary on the Apocalypse, first in The Orthodox Word, and later as a separate book.
[3] Since Fr. Seraphim's repose, Orthodox commentaries on the Scriptures by St. Cyril of Alexandria and St. Theophylact the Bulgarian have been published.
[4] In addition to translating the whole of Archbishop Averky's Commentary on the Apocalypse, Fr. Seraphim translated some portions of his Commentary on the Gospels and epistles.
[5] Later canonized by the Church in Russia.
[6] St. Ignatius' book On the Prayer of Jesus is also in English. Since Fr. Seraphim's repose, his Brotherhood has published three books by St. Theophan in English: The Spiritual Life, The Path to Salvation, and Kindling the Divine Spark.
[7] Eusebius lived in the 4th century.
[8] Cf. Mark 10:30.
[9] The movie The Last Temptation of Christ, which came out several years after Fr. Seraphim's repose, is more blasphemous than even these examples. Reprinted from The Orthodox Word Vol. 34, Nos. 3 4 (200 201) May August, 1998
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